

# Fort Andrew and The War of 1812 Part 2

By JOE SHEA

## Guns at the Bluefish River

At the end of what is now called Fort Hill Lane the locals built a small fort. It was called the "Upper Fort" and was positioned just east of a house. The fort mounted three six pounders. It was also referred to as Fort Squirt by some local people. This might have had something to do with the comparative firepower of Fort Andrew. To the northeast where the river turns to form a basin was the "Lower Fort." It was situated on a peninsula with a clear field of fire. The Lower Fort mounted two 12-pounders. Between them these two forts could effectively seal off the Bluefish River basin from marauders. If you were to go along King Caesar road and look across the mouth of the Bluefish you could see that the guns would have provided solid coverage for the shipping just up river.

Up the river behind the protection of these guns along the Bluefish the local fleet was secreted. It was made up of two ships, one brig and six schooners. The distinction in the labeling of ships was important to understand the capability and size of the vessels. Today we would incorrectly call them all ships. The townspeople, feeling that Fort Andrew and the Upper and Lower Forts were not enough, mounted additional guns on wharves and piers along the waterfront. They stretched from the Sampson pier, mounting two guns, on Standish Street to at least the



**The USS Constitution loaned a gun to the Sailors' Home on King Caesar Road.**

vicinity of the Lot Hunt pier, mounting one gun, at the foot of Freeman Place. The Duxbury waterfront would have been a formidable target with strong defenses. To be completely ready teams of rowers patrolled the harbor at night to thwart a night raid. They were to sound the alarm which would then be passed along by other means. By design an alarm was sounded one evening though no one would take responsibility. The alarm worked well and men responded from all over town

as if an electrical signal had been sent. Burning barrels of pitch, noisemakers and ringing church bells summoned the militia. Inhabitants of neighboring towns poured in to offer assistance. History never revealed the true reason for the alarm but all were satisfied that sufficient force would rush to the defense of the waterfront when called.

## Last gun on the Bluefish River

The Powder Point School, formerly at the sharp bend of King Caesar Road near

Weston Road, was a three story large wooden structure that was no longer needed as a school. It was used for a while as a summer hotel but some would argue found its highest and best use as a home for "Sailors, Marines and others, employed in the Naval service of the United States, disabled by wounds, sickness, old age or otherwise without regard to their place or enlistment." On July 27, 1931 the National Sailors Home was dedicated by a large contingent of national and local figures. Entertainment was provided by the United States Marine Corps Band. There were only a few National Sailors Homes in the country and each of them was marked with the installation of a 24 pounder smoothbore cannon (gun) from the *USS Constitution*. This gun was on loan from the Navy but displayed as a mark of respect for the Navy veterans in residence. The gun was one of a total of 62 provided for *Constitution*. The Frigate was rated at 42 guns but various configurations would have as many as 62 aboard. If you visit the ship today you will quickly determine that less than 42 guns are aboard. That is for safety and to open the area up to the public.

The National Sailors Home gun was mounted on the front lawn between the main building and the water. It was set on a concrete pad and aimed at the mouth of the Bluefish River. The gun barrel was mounted on a wooden carriage which in turn was mounted on four non pivoting steel wheels. The metal work and gun barrel were painted

black and gun was generally in good condition. The steel wheels are very typical of the installations aboard ship. This gun, being a 24 pounder, was not the largest aboard the *Constitution*, that honor went to the 32 pounder carronades which were better at close in fighting. The 24 pounder was the long range gun.

There it stood. The last gun along the Bluefish River. It had been manufactured for *Constitution* and almost certainly saw action during the war of 1812. It may well have fought the Barbary Pirates and shelled the shores of Tripoli. In the confrontation and defeat of *Guerriere* a 38 gun British warship in August of 1812 *Constitution* earned the name *Old Ironsides*. The gun would have been part of that fight.

Many current residents recall the gun. Some report climbing on it or leaning against it. Some had not realized it was no longer there. Unlike some other guns in town this one is back in the inventory of the U.S. Navy and the *USS Constitution*. The National Sailors Home which by now had merged with the Sailors Snug Harbor was down to 9 residents by 1970. They were relocated and the decision was made to close the building in 1971. The building was torn down shortly after. When the Sailors Home was closed the gun was returned to inventory and is back in Boston if not onboard *Constitution*.

No gun along the Bluefish was ever fired in defense of Duxbury while installed here.